

# YELLOWSTONE RIVER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COUNCIL

## FACT SHEET

EXHIBIT 20  
DATE 3-29-01  
SB 820

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### Conservation District Council Members:

Carbon County  
Will Alexander

Custer County  
Walter Rolf

Dawson County  
Kenny Nemitz

Park County  
Daryl Stutterheim

Prairie County  
Dave Schwarz

Richland County  
Tony Barone

Rosebud County  
Don Youngbauer

Stillwater County  
Steve Story

Sweet Grass County  
Paul Gilbert

Treasure County  
Phil Fox

Yellowstone County  
Bob Hector

McKenzie County, ND  
Orvin Finsaas

MACD  
Luther Waterland

RAC  
John Moorhouse



**Vision: A healthy river and riparian system capable of sustaining the needs of Montana citizens and communities.**

### HISTORY

The Yellowstone River stretches over 670 miles and is the longest free-flowing river in the lower 48 states. Originating in Yellowstone National Park, it drains 70,000 square miles of land before it joins the Missouri River west of Williston, North Dakota. In addition to an abundance of fish and wildlife, the Yellowstone River supports a wide variety of agricultural, domestic, industrial, and recreational uses.

The natural and historic significance of the Yellowstone River, combined with major floods in 1996 and 1997, elevated interest and increased public debate over the impacts of human activities on the River. The lack of information upon which to base permitting decisions emphasized the need for public forums to discuss complex issues and potential solutions. Governor Marc Racicot created the Upper Yellowstone River Task Force in 1997 to address problems arising from the floods and begin studying the cumulative effects in Park County. In 1999, the **Yellowstone River Conservation District Council** was formed to address conservation issues on the entire river.

### WHO WE ARE

The **Yellowstone River Conservation District Council** (Council) is made up of representatives from twelve conservation districts bordering the main stem of the Yellowstone River), a representative from Montana Association of Conservation Districts, and the Chair of the Council's Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). The Council has a chair, a vice-chair; one each selected from the upper, and lower reaches of the river (see sidebar). The Council receives technical assistance and advice from the MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Department of Environmental Quality, US Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Geological Survey, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and other agencies.

### MISSION STATEMENT

The Council's purpose is to provide local leadership, assistance, and guidance for the wise use and conservation of the Yellowstone River corridor's natural resources to sustain and improve social, environmental, and economic values. This purpose is founded on the following fundamental precepts:

1. the need for sound scientific information on which to base management decisions;
2. the need for broad-based local, regional, and national dialog to define a shared vision of the River;
3. the need for technical and financial assistance to address sustainable use issues on the Yellowstone River;
4. the need to educate and inform the public;
5. the need to provide a mechanism for resolving issues among all users and stakeholders.

## **COUNCIL FOCUS**

The Council has adopted as its focus the following points which are central to the Conservation Districts bordering the Yellowstone River and vital to all users and stakeholders:

1. Bank stabilization (310 issues);
2. Irrigation water impacts, availability, and water reservations;
3. Livestock, grazing, and farming issues;
4. Water quality and stream impairment;
5. Recreational uses of the river and the floodplain;
6. Municipal, industrial, and domestic water needs and impacts;
7. Scenic and aesthetic values of the River corridor.

## **ACTIVITIES**

- The Council and Army Corps of Engineers signed a Project Management Plan and Cost Share Agreement to conduct a federally mandated cumulative impacts study. This proposal insures local input and direction through the Council, into a federal effort to study the river.
- A Rapid Aerial Assessment was completed on the entire river to chart eroding banks, in-stream structures, irrigation facilities, bridges, and other features. This was followed by a county-by-county, on-site inventory.
- The Council co-hosted the Yellowstone River Roundtable to coordinate federal and state technical and financial assistance. The Council was recognized as the coordinating entity on the river and a commitment was made for the Federal and State agencies on the locally led effort.
- The Council established a Resource Advisory Committee and a Technical Advisory Committee to advise the Council on constituent and technical river issues, respectively.
- A publicly accessible spatial database was created with Montana's Natural Resources Inventory System.
- A Yellowstone River Resource Information and Education Center was developed, which includes a web site (<http://dnrc.mt.gov/cardd/yellowstonerivercouncil/default.asp>)
- Precision topographic and bathymetric mapping was completed of the Yellowstone River in Stillwater, Yellowstone, and Dawson counties.
- Historic aerial photos were acquired and digitized to analyze river bank migration over the past century.
- Voluntary Management Practices will be developed as guidelines for activity in the Yellowstone River corridor.

## **WORKING RELATIONSHIPS**

The Council's goal is to encourage communication and cooperation among all stakeholders on the Yellowstone River. Toward this end, the Council developed a shared vision and set of common goals with the Yellowstone River Conservation Forum, which represents recreational and environmental interests on the river. The Council and the Forum believe the conservation of the river and the sustainability of its various uses can be accomplished best by grassroots collaboration, education, incentives, and voluntary action. This list of "Common Goals" is not an exclusive list and specifically recognizes that other goals may be forthcoming from other stakeholders on the river.

### **Common Goals:**

- Maintain and improve water quality
- Maintain and improve water quantity at critical times of low flow
- Encourage and promote family farms and ranches along the Yellowstone River based on sustainable use of natural resources
- Control non-indigenous species of plants and animals that are harmful to agriculture and natural systems
- Develop and support recovery efforts for threatened and endangered river species with particular emphasis on efforts that sustain agriculture and other economic river uses
- Enhance bird, fish and wildlife habitat and wildlife programs compatible with agriculture
- Encourage partnerships with government and non-government groups
- Enhance community involvement in river stewardship
- Develop recommendations for "Voluntary Management Practices" to maintain a naturally functioning river system

**For more information visit us on the web at: <http://dnrc.mt.gov/cardd/yellowstonerivercouncil/> or contact the chair or coordinator listed on the front of this fact sheet.**